

“We ARE America!”

Cultural Politics and Chicano Movement Legacies in the Work
of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez

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Thesis submitted for the Masters Degree in International Studies, 2007.

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my main supervisor Dr. Paul Allatson for his support, inputs, encouragement and patience, as well as my co-supervisors Dr. Ilaria Vanni and Dr. Jeff Browitt for their contributions. I also want to thank my family and friends in Mexico and those *en el otro México* and Austlán who have been of great assistance in finding materials and for their support. To all of those who have been around me during these years of academic struggle, thank you. To the staff at the Institute of International Studies at the University of Technology Sydney thank you very much for your help. I would like to thank Dr. Susan Larson for kindly sending me her interview with El Vez, and Denise Thompson for her editing assistance. Finally, I would like to thank the University of Technology Sydney library staff for their assistance.

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Abstract

The musical production of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez illustrates Mexican and Chicano/a traditions of using popular music as an alternative way of narrating Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Mexican American community life in the U.S.A. These musicians grapple with the ways in which a dominant U.S. national discourse has historically subordinated Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities. Through their lyrics these musicians propose—albeit in different ways—a progressive cultural politics that underscores the importance of equality and anti-discrimination based on ethnic, cultural, gender and class positions. This thesis compares the work of Los Tigres and El Vez and argues that, beyond the merely documenting and providing a narrative representation of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a experiences in the U.S.A., these musicians must also be regarded as political activists, using their lyrics and musical profile to articulate and present alternative politics on behalf of Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as in the U.S., and in ways that work with the legacies of the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

In this thesis I attend to the differences between El Vez and Los Tigres del Norte. The musicians come from distinct musical and performance backgrounds, and work with distinct generic musical praxes. While recognizing those differences, I nonetheless identify five comparable axes of progressive politics in their work. First, they counter the notion that Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Mexican American communities in the U.S.A. form one homogenized group. Second, they emphasize community building as a form of empowerment for immigrant groups and ethnic minorities. Third, they continue the Chicano Movement fight for human rights and equality; but rather than calling for a separate nation of Aztlán, Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez claim a place for Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as as viable and productive constituencies in the U.S.A. Four, though these artists are male performers, they also deal with gender issues and female characters and thus do not uphold the subordinate role of women in Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a patriarchal societies. And five, Los Tigres del Norte and

El Vez engage with notions of an “America” whose pan-ethnic and trans-national qualities reflect the musicians’ advocacy of alliances between diverse subordinate groups. Such engagements demonstrate that Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez operate as political activists whose lyrics and musical profile confirm the lasting impact of Chicano Movement activist aspirations, while also reworking those aspirations in line with changing sociopolitical conditions.